

LUISS



BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN ECONOMICS & BUSINESS

CHAIR OF MANAGEMENT

**NAVIGATING THE ABYSS: MANAGING BRAND REPUTATION
AFTER AN ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN FAILURE**

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INTRODUCTION

The widely held belief that "There is no such thing as bad publicity" suggests that any media attention, even when negative, benefits individuals or organizations. However, this thesis challenges this simplistic notion. It aims to demonstrate that detrimental publicity exists and does not always yield positive outcomes.

This research delves into the complex dynamics of media coverage, considering factors such as tone, timing, context, and audience perception. Through empirical evidence and case studies, it shows that negative media attention can be counterproductive and harmful to objectives, reputation, and public trust. This thesis aims to explore the concept of detrimental publicity, providing a nuanced understanding that goes beyond the assumption that all publicity is inherently beneficial.

1. CHAPTER 1

1.1 WHAT IS A PUBLICITY?

The term "publicity" is defined by Oxford Language as the notice or attention given to someone or something by the media. In the context of marketing and communication, publicity pertains to the act of disseminating information about a product, individual, company, event, or concept for promotional or advertising purposes. Specifically, publicity involves the strategic dissemination of information through various media outlets and communication channels with the objective of garnering attention and fostering a positive or impactful perception within a specified audience. Publicity is frequently employed for promotional and marketing endeavors, as well as for the management of public relations and reputation. It commonly encompasses the endeavor to attain exposure in a variety of media platforms, including newspapers, magazines, television, radio, websites, social media platforms, and other forms of mass communication. The overarching goal of publicity is to capture the attention of consumers and attract a larger audience. Publicity can serve a multitude of objectives, encompassing the promotion of products or services, the elevation of awareness concerning a particular issue or cause, the enhancement of a brand's reputation, the announcement of significant developments or milestones, and more.

Essentially, publicity endeavors are geared toward engaging and captivating the consumer's attention, thus broadening its appeal. Publicity is closely entwined with the field of public relations (PR). PR professionals frequently orchestrate and manage publicity campaigns as part of their efforts to cultivate and maintain a positive image for their clients or organizations.

A fundamental component of publicity activities entails the establishment and nurturing of relationships with journalists, editors, and other media practitioners. This liaison aims to facilitate the coverage of news and stories by the media. It is important to underscore that

while both public relations and publicity strive to influence public perception, publicity does not offer the same level of control as advertising.

Publicity hinges on the media's discretion in selecting which stories to feature and how to present them. Evaluating the effectiveness of publicity endeavors can be a complex task. However, it can be assessed through various metrics, including the extent of media coverage, the reach achieved, audience engagement levels, and shifts in public sentiment or perception. In summation, publicity represents a multifaceted domain centered around the strategic dissemination of information.

It transcends mere promotional efforts and emerges as a pivotal element in shaping perceptions and managing reputations. In an era characterized by dynamic communication and information landscapes, comprehending the nuances of publicity becomes increasingly critical. It wields the potential to elevate or erode, and its power must be harnessed with care, precision, and a profound appreciation for its intricacies.

1.2 WHY PUBLICITY IS IMPORTANT

Publicity assumes a pivotal role in the establishment of brand positioning within the consumer psyche, facilitating engagement with the intended market, and catalyzing lead generation with a subsequent conversion into sales. It is imperative to recognize that even smaller enterprises necessitate effective publicity strategies to attract prospective customers and foster sales.

The manner in which a company positions itself exerts a profound influence on consumer perceptions, engendering trust and influencing purchase decisions. Furthermore, this positioning shapes the comparative view of consumers regarding the brand's competitors, invariably impacting their choices between your offerings and those of rival entities. It is

imperative to underscore that publicity serves as a preeminent determinant of brand positioning, thereby assuming an indispensable role in the realm of effective marketing.

Moreover, publicity functions as a potent conduit for ensuring the delivery of your branding message to your designated target audience, thereby accentuating its significance in the promotional landscape. A conspicuous contrast between publicity and marketing manifests prominently in the domain of costs. It is within this fiscal realm that the dichotomy between these two strategic avenues becomes most apparent. Publicity, as a cost-effective proposition, often transpires with minimal or, at times, no direct expenditures.

When a seasoned publicist artfully crafts a press release, for instance, the possibility of its dissemination hinges upon the overarching criterion of newsworthiness. It is this criterion that drives the prospect of media outlets opting to distribute the content without imposing fiscal obligations. In essence, publicity leverages the intrinsic appeal of news value, often resulting in a cost-efficient avenue for disseminating essential information to the public. Marketing, on the other hand, embarks upon a divergent trajectory characterized by a financial commitment to manifest its objectives.

Marketers systematically allocate budgets to sustain a spectrum of strategic initiatives. These encompass but are not confined to the realm of paid advertising, the procurement of promotional materials, and the astute management of multifaceted campaigns. The financial outlays associated with marketing extend to encompass the acquisition of advertisement space, intricate production processes, meticulous distribution logistics, and the defrayal of an array of ancillary costs. The expenditure profile within marketing reflects its inherently proactive nature, as it unhesitatingly invests resources to catalyze desired consumer responses.

In essence, the financial aspect underscores a noteworthy distinction between publicity and marketing. Publicity's forte lies in its judicious exploitation of news value, which

frequently translates into a cost-efficient avenue. Marketing, by contrast, assumes a proactive stance characterized by budgetary allocations, systematically orchestrated to actualize strategic imperatives.

These inherent cost dynamics within each domain not only delineate their operational divergence but also underscore the strategic considerations that organizations must weigh when navigating the terrain of promotional initiatives.

The disparities extend to the aspect of target audiences as well. In the realm of publicity, the intended recipients predominantly encompass the general public, aligning with the overarching objective of augmenting a client's public awareness. Conversely, within the domain of marketing, a refined focus is directed toward a client's specifically delineated target audience. To illustrate, consider a custom swimwear company whose core demographic comprises professional swimmers.

While marketing endeavors may revolve around this specialized audience, publicity endeavors aim to broaden the scope, striving to ensure that the general public at large becomes cognizant of their bespoke swimwear offerings, transcending the confines of a niche clientele. Furthermore, a salient distinction emerges concerning the messaging framework addressed to the public. In the context of publicity, the fundamental objective primarily centers on acquainting the audience with the mere existence of a company or its products. This facet of publicity serves as an introductory platform, striving to permeate the collective consciousness with the elemental presence of the entity.

In stark contrast, the domain of marketing operates within a distinct paradigm characterized by the formulation and dissemination of tailored and explicit messages. These messages invariably articulate the tangible benefits and utility of a product or service to consumers, elucidating how the said offering can effectively address their specific needs or

enhance their quality of life. Marketing messages often assume a persuasive and action-oriented demeanor, prompting consumers to undertake specific actions, including making purchases.

<https://www.agilitypr.com/pr-news/public-relations/3-reasons-why-companies-of-all-sizes-need-expert-publicity/#:~:text=Publicity%20is%20the%20key%20to,attract%20customers%20and%20generate%20sales.>

<https://www.authorlearningcenter.com/marketing/public-relations/w/publicity-campaigns/6985/the-differences-between-publicity-and-marketing-for-authors>

1.3 WHICH EFFECTS IT HAS

Publicity, as a multifaceted tool within the sphere of public relations, inherently possesses a dual nature, a duality that shapes its influence and impact on individuals and organizations alike. Within this nuanced framework, it is discernible that publicity can engender both favorable and unfavorable outcomes, each bearing significant implications for its subjects.

On one facet of this dichotomy, we encounter the transformative potential of positive publicity. When harnessed effectively, positive publicity serves as a formidable force capable of elevating the standing and prestige of an individual or organization. It becomes the catalyst for the augmentation of brand recognition, imbuing it with a distinct aura of credibility and trustworthiness within the collective consciousness of the target audience.

As a consequence, the dividends of positive publicity manifest in tangible ways, translating into increased consumer engagement, heightened market visibility, and the eventual attainment of business triumph. Conversely, on the other side of this dual spectrum, negative

publicity looms as a formidable adversary. It wields the potential to inflict reputational harm of a magnitude that reverberates through time.

The consequences of negative publicity can be far-reaching, permeating the very core of an entity's public image and leaving an indelible mark. It is a force that, if left unaddressed, may precipitate detrimental repercussions, ranging from diminished consumer trust and loyalty to financial setbacks and legal ramifications. In the context of this inherent duality, it becomes abundantly clear that the prudent and strategic management of publicity is an imperative skill set for individuals and organizations alike.

This entails not only the cultivation and dissemination of positive publicity but also the deft handling of negative publicity scenarios. It is in these moments of adversity that the art of crisis communication comes to the forefront. Proficiency in crisis communication equips individuals and organizations with the tools necessary to navigate treacherous waters, mitigate reputational damage, and steer the narrative toward a more favorable trajectory.

Thus, in the intricate tapestry of public relations, the dichotomy of publicity reveals itself as a force to be reckoned with. It underscores the imperative for meticulous planning, proactive engagement, and deft maneuvering within the ever-evolving landscape of public perception. To harness the full potential of publicity and shield against its potential pitfalls, the mastery of strategic communication becomes not just a strategic imperative but an indomitable asset in the pursuit of success and resilience in the face of adversity.

1.4 HOW TO CREATE A PUBLICITY

The process of generating publicity encompasses the fundamental objective of capturing the unwavering attention of the general public. In this intricate undertaking, the overarching role of publicity manifests as the systematic and methodical dissemination of pertinent

information. This mission is achieved through the diligent deployment of an array of carefully orchestrated strategies and tactics. In today's dynamic and fiercely competitive business landscape, the ability to capture the attention of your target audience and stand out amidst the constant noise is paramount.

Publicity, in its multifaceted forms, serves as a potent tool for disseminating information, shaping perceptions, and ultimately achieving your strategic objectives. The concept of generating publicity embodies the art of crafting compelling narratives, capturing the imagination of the masses, and ensuring that your message resonates with precision.

From innovative product launches that captivate the world to social causes that rally communities, from the iconic celebrity endorsements that define brands to the thought leadership that shapes industries, publicity is the conduit through which ideas, products, and stories find their way into the hearts and minds of the public.

A myriad of strategies and tactics are at one's disposal when endeavoring to cultivate and procure publicity. Publicity is generated through various methods, often initiated by publicists who craft and disseminate press releases to media contacts. These releases are meticulously tailored to address specific objectives, such as increasing brand awareness or promoting a new product.

To embark on a successful publicity campaign, one must first determine the specific goals, pinpoint the target audience by understanding their demographic and geographic characteristics, and then develop a unique and emotionally engaging narrative that resonates with precision. This narrative becomes the cornerstone of the message conveyed through press releases.

Following the narrative creation, the next step involves selecting the most suitable media channels for reaching the intended audience. Concurrently, establishing meaningful connections with journalists, bloggers, and influencers within the industry becomes

imperative. These influencers, with their aligned audiences, often play a pivotal role in endorsing products and services, thereby lending their fame and credibility to the brand.

In the contemporary landscape, social media campaigns have emerged as a potent tool for engaging audiences, amplifying messages, and forging lasting connections. This multifaceted approach to generating publicity amalgamates traditional and digital strategies, underlining the dynamic nature of modern publicity campaigns.

1.5 DISADVANTAGES OF BAD PUBLICITY

The term "negative publicity" pertains to a situation in which consumers or individuals express adverse opinions, unfavorable comments, or criticisms regarding a particular brand, product, service, or person through various online channels and platforms on the internet.

This form of negative publicity can encompass a wide range of expressions, including but not limited to negative reviews, critical social media posts, disparaging comments, and unfavorable discussions. It is a manifestation of public sentiment that can potentially have a detrimental impact on the reputation and perception of the subject in question within the digital realm. Undoubtedly, adverse publicity exerts a detrimental influence on sales performance. While there may be instances where entirely unknown companies experience a temporary surge in sales following negative media coverage, such occurrences are exceptions rather than the rule. In the broader context, negative publicity tends to cast a shadow on the long-term prospects of well-established firms.

Moreover, the repercussions extend beyond mere sales figures. Negative press can also lead to a decline in product accessibility, limiting potential consumers' choices. When consumers

and business proprietors harbor negative sentiments, their decisions reverberate throughout the market, affecting the available options for all stakeholders.

Negative publicity can often stem from the revelation of falsehoods or inaccuracies in marketing endeavors. Sometimes, companies resort to exaggerating their capabilities and inflating consumer expectations in their publicity campaigns. When these expectations are subsequently proven to be unfounded through negative media coverage, disappointment sets in, eroding trust and confidence.

Furthermore, when a company fails to honor its commitments, skepticism takes root not only among consumers but also among employees and business partners. Rebuilding trust can be an arduous and protracted process, with mistrust often propagated through word-of-mouth and social media channels. Remedying the situation may only occur when the number of staunch supporters outweighs the detractors, which can take considerable time.

Another detrimental consequence of unfavorable publicity is its potential to inflict long-term damage on brand equity. This effect is particularly pronounced in cases where businesses must recall products due to safety or health concerns. Even if only a fraction of a product's inventory is subject to recall, potential purchasers are inclined to steer clear of the brand for an extended duration. Rumors, regardless of their validity, can significantly impact sales.

However, there is a glimmer of hope. In the realm of recollecting information about a company, message, or brand, there exists a phenomenon known as the "sleeper effect." This effect describes an individual's propensity to retain knowledge of a product or company without necessarily recollecting the unfavorable memories or sentiments associated with it. Consequently, negative publicity may, at times, be ameliorated simply through the passage of time.

Last but certainly not least, adverse publicity can inflict considerable harm on brand associations—profoundly ingrained perceptions and sentiments held by customers toward a

product or firm. When customers develop an unfavorable brand association, negative perceptions often eclipse positive ones.

This, in turn, can precipitate a sustained decline in sales over time. Rectifying these changed attitudes and brand associations is typically a protracted and resource-intensive endeavor, often necessitating additional publicities and campaigns to rectify unfavorable perceptions. A fractured brand relationship also opens the door for competitors to encroach on the consumer base, further diminishing revenue streams.

https://marxcommunications.com/bad-publicity/#What_Is_Bad_Publicity

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/negative-publicity-and-its-effect-on-brand-value/>

<https://careertrend.com/info-8316545-disadvantages-bad-publicity.html>

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/example-of-publicity>

<https://stellapop.com/there-is-such-thing-as-bad-publicity-heres-how-to-avoid-bad-press/#:~:text=Negative%20publicity%20happens%20when%20your,brand%20loyalty%2C%20and%20even%20sales.>

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<https://bizfluent.com/the-disadvantages-of-bad-publicity.html>

2. CHAPTER

2.1 DOLCE&GABBANA'S SCANDAL

In November 2018 a media storm hit the famous Italian label Dolce & Gabbana, accused of racism and sexism for a series of promotional videos containing stereotypes about China and the Chinese.

The Italian fashion brand has been excluded from all major e-commerce sites in the Asian country. Because of an publicity campaign designed to promote an important fashion show that should have been held in Shanghai, but that the two designers of the brand - or perhaps the office for cultural affairs of the city, have canceled to avoid further controversy.

In the three incriminated videos you see a Chinese model tasting for the first time a piece of pizza, a plate of spaghetti and finally a cannolo, using chopsticks (with the obvious difficulties of the case), all enriched by different stereotypes (Lanterns, music that recall the east, the red color everywhere) with which the western world looks to China.

In the video with the cannoli, moreover, a voice-over asks the model if the size of the cake was too large for her tastes. Within 24 hours the video has made the rounds of social networks, triggering the reactions of users and coming to occupy four of the first five trending topics of Weibo, the social network (social media very popular in China) similar to Chinese Twitter, that in a short time deleted the videos from the platform. It is at this point that the management of the crisis of Dolce & Gabbana has become at least unusual: a screenshot appeared, in which the personal account of Stefano Gabbana (fashion designer and, along with Domenico Dolce, the co-founder of the Dolce & Gabbana) heavily insults the Chinese people.

In the private conversation he had with Diet Prada ,(famous fashion account on Instagram) Gabbana insults the Chinese division of the company for having deleted the videos, and China in general. "From now on I will say in all the interviews that I do that China is a shitty country

and that it can be quiet, we live very well without you" and still "they feel inferior, and not dolce e Gabbana to be racist.

China ignorant dirty mafia smelly" and finally turning to diet prada says "Do you think I'm afraid of your posts?". The screenshots of the conversation were shared on Weibo countless times, the indignation grew, the hashtag #boycottdolce becomes trend topic, and the first consequences soon arrived. Actors, Chinese celebrity models announce that they will not take part in the show, as well as Vogue China director Angelica Cheung.

The agencies are announcing that they're not gonna parade models. The fashion house tried to justify this with an alleged hack of Gabbana's account, but the strategy did not bear fruit and several celebrities took a stand against the label, defying the Shanghai event. " What happened today is really unpleasant" write the two designers on social media, "not only for us, but for all those who worked night and day to give life to this project.

Our dream was to hold an event in Shanghai that would be a tribute to China. But in the meantime, the boycott has arrived. Upon waking up this morning, the company's management found itself excluded from several Chinese e-commerce platforms, on all three big Asians in the sector Tmall, JD.com and Suning, but also from cross-border ones like netease Kaola and Ymatou. D&G was therefore forced to cancel the event, but even before it did the company was the Chinese government itself to cancel the parade (the cost of which was around 25 million). In recent times, owing to the setbacks encountered in their social media publicity campaign in China, the esteemed fashion house, Dolce & Gabbana, made a strategic shift in an attempt to rejuvenate the brand's prominence. In 2019, they unveiled a distinctive approach, bucking the contemporary trend, and re-embracing traditional media formats, such as magazines and newspapers, in a more pronounced manner than previously undertaken.

To execute this strategic pivot, Dolce & Gabbana engaged the talents of seven accomplished photographers. Each photographer was tasked with interpreting the brand's

intrinsic essence from diverse perspectives, all of which, however, resonated with the distinctive character and ethos of the fashion house.

Through their creative lenses, these photographers encapsulated the visages of iconic figures, revered in the annals of Dolce & Gabbana's history, alongside fresh faces that epitomized the maison's contemporary spirit. The casting for this endeavor encompassed a cadre of luminaries who had graced the fashion runways in the brand's creations in bygone years. This illustrious roster included personalities of the stature of Monica Bellucci, Carla Bruni, Eva Herzigova, and Marpessa Hennink, who have all left an indelible mark on Dolce & Gabbana's storied legacy.

<https://openmag.it/blog/2017/09/10/spot-dolce-gabbana-deanerys-jon-snow-protagonisti/>

<https://www.lifeandpeople.it/gli-spot-dolce-e-gabbana-alla-scoperta-dellitalia-pillole-di-magia/> https://www.lettera43.it/dolce-e-gabbana-razzismo-sessismo-moda/?refresh_ce



2.2 BALENCIAGA'S SCANDAL

The controversy and criticism are linked to two campaigns of the brand.

In one the models were children holding bags that resembled teddy bears with bondage accessories. On the other hand, the pictures showed documents on the laws concerning child pornography. It all started on November 16: Balenciaga published (and quickly deleted) the Balenciaga Gift Shop, signed by Italian photographer Gabriele Galimberti.

The shots showed six children with inappropriat elements, including wine glasses, collars featuring conspicuous bondage references, straps, and fetish-inspired teddy bears and handbags made of destroyed teddy bears from the Spring/Summer 2023 collection already seen in Spring collections fashion show in Paris.

What was creepy about these bags? The eyes of the bears were black and the body was equipped with a mesh top and leather trim. In a short time, users started to connect these handbags to accessories with a bondage style, criticizing the choice of combining children with such a vision.

Then the Spanish brand launched a new campaign, Garde-Robe 2023. Some observant viewers noted that enlarging the photographs that were present on the scene documents about the Supreme Court decisions on child pornography laws and the presence of a book dedicated to the works of the Belgian painter Michael Borremans.

This particular detail left users perplexed, as Borremans' oeuvre often explores dark and unsettling themes, occasionally featuring depictions of unclothed children, scenes of violence, and imagery suggestive of cannibalism or occult rituals. Notably, none of these unsettling elements were visually present in the campaign; however, an individual who investigated the

campaign on Twitter pointed out the inclusion of a monograph on the painter amid a stack of books.

In response to these revelations, a contingent of customers opted to express their discontent publicly by disseminating videos in which they deliberately destroyed garments and accessories associated with the brand, often resorting to the drastic measure of setting these items on fire. This protest movement gained momentum and visibility through the widespread use of the hashtag #BurnBalenciaga on various social media platforms.

Balenciaga's response to the online criticism and controversy surrounding its campaigns was not immediate. The brand issued a statement of apology for the Gift Shop campaign, pledging to remove it from social media, with the statement being posted on November 24th. The statement expressed sincere regret for any offense caused by the holiday campaign, particularly the inappropriate inclusion of plush bags with children, and the brand's swift action in removing the campaign from all platforms.

Subsequent apologies were issued regarding the Garde-Robe campaign, acknowledging the display of disturbing documents. Balenciaga conveyed its deep concern for the matter, taking a stern stance against any form of child abuse and affirming its commitment to child safety and well-being.

On November 25th, Balenciaga initiated legal proceedings by filing documents in a New York court to pursue a \$25 million lawsuit against the production company North Six and production designer Nicholas Des Jardins, who were responsible for the set design of the Garde-Robe campaign.

The lawsuit alleged that the production company and designer had engaged in inexplicable acts and omissions, characterized as malicious or, at the very least, extraordinarily reckless.

In a subsequent Instagram post on November 28th, Balenciaga disclosed that the documents included in the campaign photographs were introduced without the brand's knowledge. These elements were brought by third parties who initially represented them as

false office documents but later revealed them to be authentic legal documents, possibly stemming from a television series set.

Balenciaga accepted full responsibility for its lack of control in this matter. While Balenciaga took responsibility for the first campaign involving children and bondage-style bear bags, it notably filed a complaint only for the second campaign, which featured the controversial documents.

Photographer Galimberti, involved in the campaigns, clarified his role by emphasizing that he had no influence over the product selection, model choices, or their combinations. He explained that as a photographer, his role was limited to lighting the scene and capturing images in line with his signature style.

The direction of the campaign and the choice of displayed objects were beyond his purview. Balenciaga concluded its statement by issuing another apology for the events, though it did not succeed in quelling the ongoing controversy. On November 28th, The Business of Fashion announced the revocation of the Global Voices 2022 award conferred on Balenciaga's creative director, Demna, citing the campaign's images as "completely inconsistent with our values." The site further noted that Balenciaga declined an invitation to attend and offer an explanation.

<https://openmag.it/blog/2017/09/10/spot-dolce-gabbana-deanerys-jon-snow-protagonisti/>

<https://www.lifeandpeople.it/gli-spot-dolce-e-gabbana-alla-scoperta-dellitalia-pillole-di-magia/>

<https://www.lettera43.it/dolce-e-gabbana-razzismo-sessismo-moda/>



2.3 VERSACE'S SCANDAL

Chinese media in 2019 brought to light a notable incident involving a t-shirt produced and sold by the renowned fashion brand Versace within the Chinese market. This incident pertained to the inclusion of city names on the t-shirt, along with their associated countries of origin.

However, what sparked widespread controversy was the glaring omission of Hong Kong and Macao from the list of cities designated as part of China. This omission, albeit seemingly

minor, had significant political and social ramifications, leading to a barrage of accusations against Versace, alleging that the fashion house had crossed a line by challenging China's national sovereignty.

The contentious design of the t-shirt featured an array of city names, encompassing not only capital cities but also major urban centers from Europe and the Americas. Crucially, each city was paired with its respective country of origin, a common motif in fashion depicting international travel and cosmopolitanism.

However, the issue that generated considerable unrest centered around the classification of Macao and Hong Kong as independent states within the design, in stark contrast to their historical status as former European colonies that had returned to Chinese sovereignty at the close of the 1990s.

The reaction to this perceived affront to China's territorial integrity was swift and vehement, with social media platforms serving as a battleground for public discourse and criticism. Chinese actress Yang Mi, a prominent figure in the entertainment industry, took a stand against Versace by promptly terminating her professional collaboration with the brand. Her decision, made public through her social media channels, accused Versace of attempting to undermine China's national unity and sovereignty. In an attempt to mitigate the escalating crisis, Donatella Versace, the creative force behind the fashion house, issued a formal statement on both Facebook and Instagram. In her statement, she conveyed profound remorse for the unfortunate error, underlining that there had never been any intention to disrespect or challenge China's national sovereignty.

Versace responded swiftly to the evolving situation by removing the controversial t-shirts from stores, an action taken on July 24th. Subsequently, the company confirmed that the unsold t-shirts had been systematically destroyed.



https://www.ilmessaggero.it/moda/news/versace_cina_t_shirt_maglietta_donatella_versace_scuse-4671227.html

<https://www.open.online/2019/08/11/versace-protesta-del-popolo-cinese-contro-una-t-shirt-del-marchio-dalta-moda>

3. CHAPTER 3

3.1 STEREOTYPES

3.1.1 *Dolce&Gabbana Example*

Dolce&Gabbana strategically embarked on a concerted endeavor with their "DG Loves China" campaign, with the overarching objective of fortifying their presence within the

flourishing Chinese luxury fashion market. In recent years, this market has demonstrated remarkable growth, rendering it an alluring prospect for discerning high-end brands.

The campaign, a cornerstone of their comprehensive strategy, was meticulously designed to access and thrive in this lucrative terrain. Central to this campaign's multifaceted goals was the unequivocal aim of augmenting the brand's visibility among Chinese consumers.

To accomplish this, Dolce&Gabbana meticulously sought to establish a profound and authentic connection with its Chinese audience by showcasing cultural elements and venerable traditions.

This strategic intent was discernibly manifest in the deliberate inclusion of chopsticks within their promotional materials. In doing so, the brand aspired to artfully craft an imaginative synthesis of Chinese and Italian cultures, one that would reverberate harmoniously with the discerning sensibilities of their target demographic.

Remarkably, the campaign's primary promotional conduit was the realm of social media, a strategic choice that underscored Dolce&Gabbana's acute interest in actively engaging with the younger strata of consumers who wield substantial influence on these digital platforms. In prescient anticipation of the potential for virality and the generation of widespread social media buzz, the brand astutely harnessed the formidable reach and communicative potency of online networks to amplify its messaging and extend its resonance to a broader and more diverse audience.

3.1.2 *COLLECT DATA*

The foremost objective underlying the publicity campaign was to orchestrate the seamless promotion of the brand's new collection and the highly anticipated fashion show, originally slated to transpire in Shanghai.

This promotional initiative was predominantly executed through the dissemination of meticulously crafted videos across various social networking platforms, strategically tailored to resonate with the intended audience. Evidencing a pronounced proclivity for fostering robust connections with the younger echelons of consumers who actively partake in these digital realms, Dolce & Gabbana's choice to predominantly channel its promotional efforts through social media was astute.

This strategic deployment was ostensibly driven by the brand's aspiration to engender a viral phenomenon, generating widespread social media murmur and catalyzing organic engagement with its brand narrative. However, despite the meticulous planning and calculated expectations, Dolce & Gabbana inadvertently encountered a profoundly adverse and unforeseen response from both its Chinese audience and the global community at large.

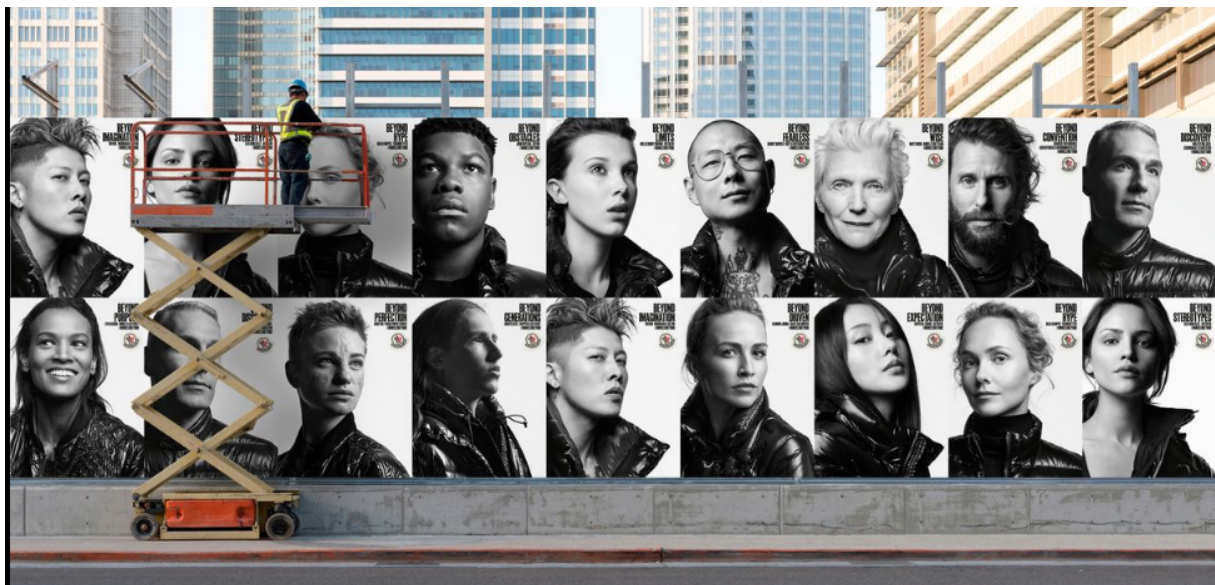
This unexpected turn of events culminated in the compelled cancellation of the planned event. It is noteworthy that this cancellation incurred significant financial repercussions, as the fashion show represented a substantial investment of approximately 25 million. Furthermore, it is pivotal to underscore that the Chinese government took proactive measures to cancel the fashion show prior to the company's decision, thus exacerbating the magnitude of the crisis and the ensuing damage control efforts undertaken by Dolce & Gabbana.

3.1.3 *COMPETITORS ANALYSIS*

In that very same year, there emerged a publicity campaign that achieved notable success, the Moncler advertising campaign. This campaign, characterized by timeless black and white imagery lensed by the acclaimed photographer Craig McDean, revolved around the portrayal of nineteen individuals hailing from diverse walks of life. These individuals encompassed a wide spectrum of ages, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds.

Yet, they all found common ground under the unifying banner of a singular motif: "beyond." This evocative term symbolized the epitome of unadulterated human resilience, compelling individuals to transcend the confines of rigid paradigms and preconceived norms. This advertising endeavor encapsulated an efficacious and compelling life proposition, underpinned by its authenticity and unmediated directness, mirroring the ethos of the Moncler brand itself.

With the mere utterance of a single word, "beyond," this campaign remarkably succeeded in forging a profound connection among disparate ethnic groups—a notable achievement that had eluded Dolce & Gabbana in a parallel context.



<https://www.elle.com/it/moda/ultime-notizie/g22336805/moda-autunno-inverno-2018-2019-campagne/>

3.1.4 *CONTENT AND MESSAGING*

The Dolce & Gabbana Chinese campaign scandal of 2018 garnered widespread criticism for its content and messaging. The campaign prominently featured a Chinese model attempting to consume Italian cuisine, such as pizza and spaghetti, with the use of chopsticks.

This portrayal was met with significant backlash, as it was widely perceived as culturally insensitive and offensive. The campaign's content came under intense scrutiny for perpetuating stereotypes and seemingly mocking Chinese culture by depicting a Chinese model struggling to eat Italian food using chopsticks. Such a representation was regarded as disrespectful and offensive, reflecting a profound lack of cultural understanding.

It failed to acknowledge the profound significance of chopsticks in Chinese culinary traditions and the paramount importance of cultural sensitivity in an increasingly globalized world. Furthermore, the campaign had the unintended consequence of exploiting cultural differences for comedic effect, a practice generally deemed inappropriate and offensive. These various factors collectively underscored a profound miscommunication of the brand's intentions. While Dolce & Gabbana may have aspired to create a harmonious fusion of Chinese and Italian cultures, the execution ultimately conveyed a sense of mockery rather than celebration.

3.2 POLITICAL T-SHIRT

3.2.1 *Versace Example*

It is conceivable that Versace's intent behind the T-shirt design was to create a distinctive and visually striking fashion item, with the aim of attracting consumers seeking a fashion statement.

Their underlying objective may have been to evoke a sense of cosmopolitanism, targeting individuals who either identify with or possess affiliations to various regions of the world. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that the T-shirt design generated controversy due to its perceived lack of respect and its politically sensitive nature, particularly among Chinese consumers.

The inclusion of Hong Kong and Macau as distinct entities from China within the design raised significant concerns related to the "One China" policy, which unequivocally asserts that both Hong Kong and Macau are integral parts of China. Consequently, this decision triggered a vehement backlash from Chinese consumers who interpreted it as a transgression against their nation's sovereignty.

In this particular case, although Versace may have harbored intentions related to fashion innovation and enhancing brand appeal, the controversy underscored the paramount importance of considering political and cultural sensitivities when embarking on global marketing endeavors. Consequently, the incident necessitated an official apology from Versace and the subsequent withdrawal of the T-shirt from the market, serving as a stark reminder of the potential repercussions associated with inadvertently insensitive messaging within the fashion industry.

3.2.2 *COLLECT DATA*

In my discerning assessment, it becomes evident that Versace, through the creation of the controversial T-shirt, seemingly sought to imbue its product with a sense of cosmopolitanism reminiscent of a trend prevalent in the 2000s. The intent, one could speculate, was to craft a unique and eye-catching fashion statement that would resonate with consumers seeking a distinctive and globally inspired aesthetic. By featuring a collection of world cities alongside their respective countries of origin, Versace may have aimed to evoke a sense of

internationalism and cultural fusion. Such an approach could conceivably appeal to a consumer demographic that identifies with or maintains connections to diverse regions across the globe. However, it is imperative to delve into the repercussions that transpired. The T-shirt's design unwittingly ventured into politically and culturally sensitive territory, which resulted in a starkly contrasting outcome. The inclusion of Hong Kong and Macau as separate entities from China on the T-shirt's graphic became a focal point of controversy, eliciting strong reactions from Chinese consumers. This contention hinged on the principle of the "One China" policy, a fundamental political stance that asserts Hong Kong and Macau as integral parts of China. From a broader perspective, this incident underscores the profound importance of considering political and cultural sensitivities in global marketing endeavors, particularly in an age of heightened interconnectedness. What may have been intended as an innocuous and fashionable tribute to the global cosmopolitanism of the 2000s took an unexpected turn, accentuating the potential pitfalls and perils associated with inadvertent messaging within the fashion industry. In response to the tumultuous fallout, Versace issued a formal apology and promptly withdrew the T-shirt from the market. This course of action highlights the brand's acknowledgment of its unintended misstep and the recognition of the gravity of the situation. It also serves as a stark reminder of the substantial risks that can emerge from insensitivity to cultural and political nuances in the highly scrutinized arena of fashion marketing.

3.2.3 *CONTENT AND MESSAGING*

In response to the 2019 T-shirt scandal, which had elicited strong disapproval from Chinese consumers, Versace initiated a formal course of action to address the issue and mitigate its adverse effects. The brand's response was meticulously conveyed through various social media platforms, encompassing prominent platforms such as Instagram and Twitter. The primary objective of these carefully crafted posts was to openly acknowledge the prevailing controversy, thus validating the concerns of those who had found the T-shirt design offensive.

Concurrently, Versace promptly took the decisive step of removing all promotional materials associated with the contentious T-shirt from its official social media accounts. This encompassed a comprehensive removal of images and posts that had previously featured the design in question. In addition to these measures, Versace strategically utilized its social media platforms as a communicative conduit to reiterate its profound commitment to the principles of cultural respect and the intrinsic worth of all nations and ethnicities. The brand articulated the significance of its global presence and underscored its unwavering dedication to fostering diversity and inclusivity across its spectrum of operations. Furthermore, it is reasonable to surmise that Versace engaged in concerted efforts to collaborate with its influential cadre of social media influencers and brand ambassadors. This collaboration likely entailed ensuring that the messaging disseminated by these key stakeholders closely aligned with Versace's official statements and sentiments. By enlisting the support of influencers, the brand could amplify its message of contrition and its steadfast commitment to continual improvement. In sum, Versace's comprehensive response to the T-shirt scandal of 2019 encompassed both formal public apologies through social media channels and proactive steps to align its promotional strategies with the values of cultural sensitivity, diversity, and inclusivity. This concerted approach was undertaken with the aim of ameliorating the situation and safeguarding the brand's reputation amidst the unfolding controversy.

<https://www.open.online/2019/08/11/versace-protesta-del-popolo-cinese-contro-una-t-shirt-del-marchio-dalta-moda/>

<https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2019/08/16/prima-dg-poi-versace-nella-bufera-in-cina-ora-basta/5390606/>

<https://www.outpump.com/gaffe-versace-infuriare-cina/>

3.3 NEGLIGENCE

3.2.1 *Balenciaga Example*

Balenciaga, in its pursuit of establishing a brand identity that would distinguish it from other luxury fashion labels, deliberately introduced a collection design characterized by its unique and attention-commanding attributes.

The brand's strategic intent behind this distinctiveness was to catalyze heightened interest and engender extensive conversations revolving around the brand. As an integral component of its promotional strategy, Balenciaga strategically harnessed the potential of social media engagement. The brand opted to predominantly employ social media platforms as its primary channel for disseminating the campaign.

This strategic choice was underpinned by the brand's recognition of the contemporary landscape, where a substantial portion of the populace actively participates in online platforms. While Balenciaga may have foreseen the potential for its campaign to garner substantial online attention and provoke widespread discussions, it is plausible to conjecture that the brand did not anticipate the level of confusion and controversy that ultimately ensued. Rather than the intended outcome of generating significant online tsunami of indignation and fostering extensive discourse, the campaign unexpectedly triggered a tidal wave of indignation and controversy among a substantial segment of users.

This unforeseen reaction led to public denunciations of the brand, manifested in the burning of its garments and the widespread dissemination of disapproval across social media platforms.

3.2.2 *COLLECT DATA:*

The crisis was ignited by a tweet from the Twitter user @shoe0nhead, which exposed Balenciaga for allegedly promoting child pornography. Subsequently, this tweet gained significant traction, appearing on television and proliferating across various social media platforms. Notably, TikTok emerged as a focal point for the controversy, where hashtags such as #burnbalenciaga and #cancelbalenciaga amassed over 300 million views. This controversy inflicted considerable damage on Balenciaga's reputation and plunged the brand into a profound communication crisis. A wide spectrum of stakeholders, including social media users, media outlets, celebrities, and even legal actions in the form of lawsuits, became embroiled in the aftermath. The landscape of digital technologies has ushered in a paradigm shift in consumer behavior. Contemporary consumers prefer direct interaction with brands and peers, openly sharing their opinions and preferences. Designers and brands now navigate a digital terrain where the balance of power has decidedly shifted in favor of the consumer. Information sources have diversified, encompassing customers, competitors, observers, employees, and online communities. In this context, consumers wield remarkable influence, exerting the authority to demand, commend, or condemn brands' online and offline actions. Consumers, as both creators and active participants in the digital sphere, exercise the power to hold brands accountable, swiftly reacting to any actions that contravene their values. This environment empowers online consumers and netizens to serve as vigilant watchdogs, meticulously monitoring brands' every move and responding promptly to any perceived missteps. Following the scandal, Balenciaga adopted a low-profile stance on social media and minimized its public appearances. On TikTok, hashtags like #cancelbalenciaga, accumulating more than 280 million views, and #boycottbalenciaga, with over 180 million views, garnered substantial attention. An intriguing hashtag, #balenciagate, emerged, signifying the revelation of the brand's perceived association with the sexualization of minors. Collectively,

these statistics underscore the magnitude of this unprecedented crisis on TikTok, where videos critical of Balenciaga have amassed more than 600 million views.

3.2.3 *COMPETITOR ANALYSIS*

In contrast, I would like to present a highly successful Versace campaign that leveraged the themes of adventure and rebellion to great effect. These two central themes served as the cornerstone of the campaign, permeating the visual narrative with their significance. The campaign's imagery revolves around vibrant portrayals of youthful individuals in constant motion, exuding an exuberant sense of positivity. This dynamism is further accentuated by a rich palette of warm and muted colors, enhancing the visual impact. The portraits featured in the campaign exude intimacy, rebellion, and an unmistakable sense of freedom. The narrative of the campaign revolves around a group of American youths, captured in their intimate moments of travel and exploration. These moments are punctuated by iconic elements such as vintage cars and classic American diners, seamlessly interwoven with fashion elements such as cropped t-shirts and substantial hooded sweatshirts. At its core, the campaign explores themes of wanderlust, personal growth, and the allure of escapism. The evocative photographs by T-Bone Fletcher serve as a poignant homage to the alternative youth culture of the 1990s, capturing the zeitgeist of that era with authenticity and depth.



<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/it/moda/storie/a41029093/migliori-campagne-moda-autunno-inverno-2022-2023/>

3.2.4 *CONTENT AND MESSAGE*

Since assuming the role of artistic director at Balenciaga in 2015, Demna has consistently steered the brand toward controversy, often quite deliberately. It appeared that the shock and outrage generated by such moments were an integral part of his strategy. In response to the recent controversy surrounding the inappropriate images, Demna issued a statement in which he took full responsibility for the controversy. He asserted that, while he occasionally aimed to provoke thought through his work, he would never, under any circumstances, intend to do so using such a deeply distressing subject as child abuse, which he unequivocally condemned. Kim Kardashian, a globally influential celebrity, walked the Balenciaga couture runway show in July, and she publicly acknowledged Demna's significant influence on reshaping her personal style following her divorce. However, on November 27, she announced that she was in the process of reassessing her relationship with the brand, given the backlash she received for her delayed response to the controversy. In a statement on Twitter, Ms. Kardashian expressed her deep concern as a mother of four children over the disturbing images featured in the campaign. She emphasized that the safety and well-being of children must be a paramount consideration and that any attempt to normalize child abuse in any form should be unequivocally rejected by society. Ms. Kardashian also noted her appreciation for Balenciaga's prompt removal of the campaigns and their public apology. Following discussions with the brand, she expressed her belief that Balenciaga comprehends the gravity of the issue and will take the necessary steps to ensure that such an incident never occurs again.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/28/style/balenciaga-campaign-controversy.html#:~:text=We%20strongly%20condemn%20abuse%20of,for%20the%20Garde%2DRobe%20campaign.>

4. CHAPTER 4

4.1 CONCLUSIONS

Every day, consumers worldwide are exposed to an incredible number of advertising messages through various media and channels. However, the human mind is certainly unable to store all the information provided, often resulting in the loss of details that have cost companies thousands of euros and significant creative efforts.

However, when an advertising campaign manages to strike a chord, evoke emotions, and shape opinions, it is rarely forgotten, whether the impact is positive or negative. The instances I have examined all share a common thread of insufficient attention to the subjects addressed in advertising campaigns, whether due to stereotypes, political factors, negligence, or an attempt to create excessive sensationalism.

In an era where every person can easily and quickly express their opinion (whether accurate or not) through social media, those responsible for advertising must be prepared to avoid the trap of political incorrectness while, of course, not downplaying their advertisements. Therefore, what I want to convey is that political correctness must be used intelligently and to one's advantage, because even the slightest slip or inattention can trigger a chain reaction, leading to widespread outrage and protests.

Thanks to or because of social media, every person with a presence on social networks can be considered a customer, whether they make purchases or not, however, they can express their opinion by engaging with brand posts or influencer content.

Therefore, those involved in advertising must carefully study the audience they want to reach, the culture they want to engage with, and the message they intend to convey. For

example, the Dolce&Gabbana advertising campaign was not suitable for the target audience it aimed to reach. Chinese customers have a penchant for luxury and exclusivity.

Using certain stereotypes and clichés had the potential to deeply offend this demographic, as indeed happened.

The second mistake in this saga was attributable to Stefano Gabbana himself. His response to the journalist's inquiry exacerbated the crisis, despite later claiming that his account had been compromised. This was undoubtedly an error, as individuals in prominent positions within a company must invariably exercise discretion in their communication. They cannot presume to express their thoughts recklessly, especially if such expressions contravene established norms of political correctness.

Gabbana's actions had direct consequences for the brand. A responsible brand always takes into account user opinions, their feedback, whether positive or negative. Furthermore, communities, especially in the digital realm, can present a tremendous opportunity for brands. It is essential to acknowledge that word-of-mouth remains one of the most potent means of enhancing visibility.

2 Balenciaga, too, embarked on a path seeking success through avant-garde fashion shows and provocative marketing strategies, which propelled the brand to the forefront of social media and fashion enthusiasts' attention. However, these daring endeavors, sometimes subversive and often unconventional, which underpinned the brand's recent successes, now appear to have fallen out of favor.

With each attempt to create hype around the brand, the risk of stumbling upon errors has surged, and lapses in the careful study and oversight of advertising campaigns have undeniably eroded the brand's appeal to potential buyers. Balenciaga has also been liable for another transgression that remains impermissible in times of heightened political correctness: indolence.

The brand's delayed response to the crisis, characterized by a series of numerous and inconclusive statements, only intensified the viral nature of the issue, magnifying its media exposure. Balenciaga did not swiftly assume responsibility but instead adopted a reactive strategy akin to a "Deny Response Option" of the scapegoat variety, where the individual responsible for the crisis lays blame on external parties or entities.

In conclusion, artistic expression should never be stifled, yet the artist must possess the discernment to gauge the potential for generating intrigue versus provoking controversy. In navigating the deep abyssal of political correctness, it would be prudent to engage individuals well-versed in social media dynamics, who can review advertising campaigns before their release, offering valuable feedback to forestall discussions and protests related to societal issues. In cases where advertising campaigns nonetheless provoke indignation, or negative feedback on social media, due to politically incorrect elements, a judicious course of action might involve reducing item prices, as while protests may attract many individuals but the allure of cost savings has the potential to appeal to an even larger audience.

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